

NSC BRIEFING

28 October 1960

LAOS

- I. The situation in Laos continues to drift with little apparent progress toward unity among contending non-Communist groups now centered around Savannakhet in the south and Luang Prabang in the north.
- II. In Vientiane, Premier Souvanna Phouma is maintaining his delicate balancing act, but has accomplished little, if anything, in his efforts to bring Captain Kong Le and the extremist forces he symbolizes under control.
 - A. Pathet Lao influence in the capital seems to be on the increase, and evidence of a close working relationship with Kong Le is growing.
 1. Kong Le, for example, permitted a ranking Pathet military leader to lecture army officers in Vientiane on the virtues of neutrality last weekend while Souvanna was out of town.
 2. Kong Le's paratroopers and Pathet Lao elements are working hand in glove southeast of Pak Sane. There are indications that they may be preparing for coordinated attacks on General Phoumi's forces just to the south.
 - B. The Vientiane regional commander, in an unusually frank admission of his lack of control, recently warned American officials not to give his region any new military hardware since it would merely end up in Pathet Lao hands.

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State Department review completed

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Luang Prabang, the First Military Region is engaged in an effort to improve its military position against the Pathet Lao. But the region is maintaining nominal loyalty to Vientiane while avoiding open all-out war with Phoumi's Savannakhet group.

- A. Clashes have been reported between the region's troops and the Pathets in southeast Phong Saly province, apparently triggered by army efforts to regain two posts lost earlier in the month.
- B. General Ouane, Souvanna's armed forces commander, apparently will stay in Luang Prabang to direct the First region's buildup.
- C. Ouane and other leaders in Luang Prabang professed themselves surprised at Souvanna's show of anti-Communism during a recent visit, but they say they have warned him that he must take some positive action to improve the situation in Vientiane and to come to terms with Phoumi, or the north will openly oppose his government.

IV. Souvanna's freedom of action is severely limited. On the one hand he is under the constant threat of overthrow by Kong Le, possibly supported by the Pathet Lao; on the other, he must keep the First Military Region from breaking away.

- A. His acceptance in principle of Soviet economic aid, in addition to flowing from his conception of neutrality, was probably intended to appease Kong Le and his followers.

V. Phoumi meanwhile is again becoming restive in Savannakhet.

- A. He has complained about American ^{support} ~~military equipment deliveries to Luang Prabang, questioning Ouane's willingness to take action counter to Souvanna's wishes and accusing the US of trying to create another force outside of Vientiane to counterbalance him.~~

VI. In view of Souvanna's and Phoumi's mutual unwillingness to enter into meaningful negotiations, the prospects are dim for an early break in the crisis, with the Pathet Lao in the meantime continuing to profit from the confusion.

A. ~~In~~ the negotiations now in progress between government and Pathet Lao leaders, *have been inconclusive and are not so far satisfactory to either side.* the Pathets are demanding participation in a coalition government, according to a Laotian government delegate to the talks.

VII. Meanwhile, a four-day Buddhist festival begins tomorrow, during which all government offices will be closed.

A. While traditionally this is a period of official inactivity, it could provide the opportunity for some surprise action--such as a renewed offensive by Kong Le against Phoumi, or a coup d'etat against the Souvanna government.

for some time
VII. Meanwhile, Phoumi has entered the scene and is sounding out the possibility of his being acceptable as a compromise candidate.

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